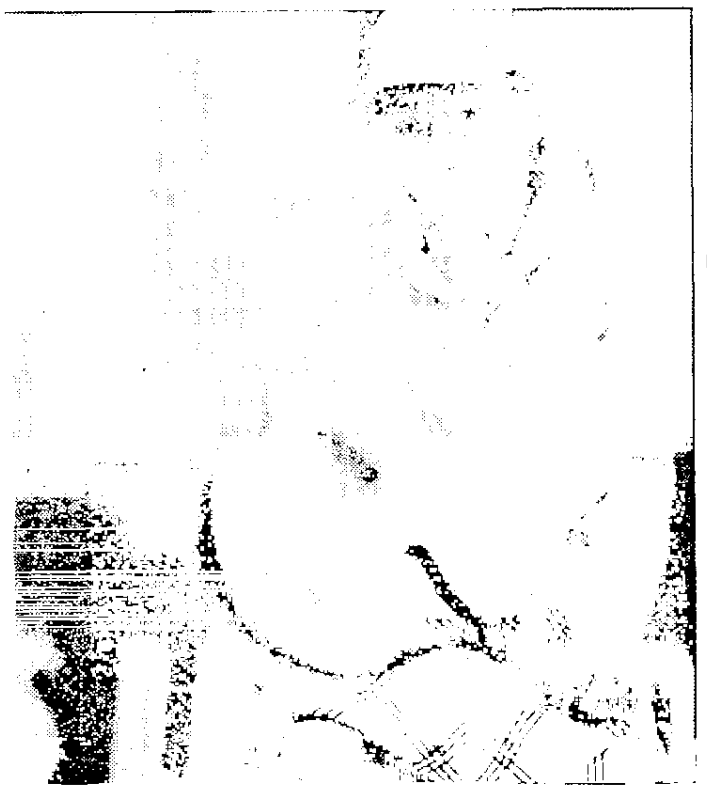
TENNIS



PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS/SUN-TIMES

ıa Navratilova hits a return in the Legends Tour event at Navy She and Rosie Casals lost 6-4 to Tracy Austin and Chris Evert.

Legends offer vintage tennis

Navratilova shines at Navy Pier

BY CAROL SLEZAK
STAFF REPORTER

It seemed like old times Saturday night at Navy Pier. The Virginia Slims Legends Tour came to town, featuring Team Navratilova vs. Team Evert, renewing a rivalry that spanned 17 years on the women's tour.

Martina Navratilova, 40, said she loved returning to Chicago. She owned the Chicago stop on the women's tour for years.

"When I was playing on the tour and I'd come here, I spent all my energy on the court," she said. "Now I can go sightseeing and enjoy myself more. I can get energy on and off the court."

Navratilova wasn't overlooking the matches, though.

"It's pretty competitive," she said of the Legends Tour, which features Billie Jean King's team-tennis concept in a six-city tour. "And they beat us on the first stop [in March in Tampa, Fla.]."

And Navratilova knew she'd be facing Chris Evert in singles on Saturday night.

The stage was set for the featured match after two doubles matches. In the first, Pam Shriver and Virginia Wade of Team Evert beat King and Wendy Turnbull of Team Navratilova 6-2. In the second, Evert and Tracy Austin defeated Rosie Casals and Navratilova 6-4. Teams get one point for each game won.

Navratilova used her doubles match to psych herself up for her match against Evert. She walked on the court dancing to a Spice Girls song, making sure the standing-room-only crowd of more than 3,300 was on her side. Then she ran down lobs, chased down balls deep in the corners and barked at Casals whenever she missed a shot. She and Casals lost, but Navratilova was pumped up.

The match against Evert was a tribute to Navratilova's physical conditioning. She said she wants to play doubles at Wimbledon this summer "if she can find a partner" and has remained in competitive shape. It showed.

At one point in the match, with Navratilova up 3-2, Evert yelled, "Aren't you getting tired?" Evert playfully tugged at the linesperson, asking to borrow her chair for a rest.

Later, Navratilova hit a shot that seemed in but was called out. Someone in the crowd yelled, "Don't let him get away with it, Martina." She yelled back, "What do you want me to do, head-butt him?"

Evert magnanimously overturned the call, and Navratilova won the match 6-3, but not before Evert tried once more, saying, "Would you give me just one point? I have three kids."

Navratilova replied, "I have three dogs."

In the final match, Austin and Shriver lost to Zina Garrison Jackson and Navratilova 6-2, giving Team Navratilova a narrow 18-17 lead heading into competition today, which begins at 2 p.m.

Navratilova, Evert, tough competition, great entertainment. Seems like old times.

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